

# Changing Landscapes 2 Introduction

## Background

In Wisconsin, 85% of the land is owned by private parties. Our state government has a long history of supporting private landowners and private property rights. Private landowners make land use decisions that affect the environment. Thus, our best method for protecting the state's natural resources and environment is to work with private landowners to support and inform their decision-making process.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), by virtue of several state laws, has the authority and responsibility to address land use issues. For the last 10 years, the DNR has worked to define its role in supporting local decisions to ensure they are environmentally responsible. The DNR defined four major roles it should play: (1) provide information, (2) predict impacts, (3) suggest alternatives, and (4) advocate sound land use.

Among the requisite functions is the department's mandate to support smart growth and the comprehensive planning process (Wis. Stats. ch. 66). The passing of the state's Comprehensive Planning Law (a.k.a. Smart Growth) in 1999 provides an unprecedented opportunity for the state to be involved early on and up front in the process of planning and land use decisions, via its four major roles. One component of this support includes an effort to promote impact assessment tools that can be used by the general public, public officials, and groups that advise the public regarding land use decisions. The DNR believes partnering with other groups with similar goals can enhance this effort.

As we moved forward with the idea of bringing people together for a workshop to learn about various decision support tools, we assembled representatives from diverse agencies and organizations to discuss our shared interest in land use and public outreach. In spring of 2003, we held *Changing Landscapes: Anticipating the Effects of Local Land Use Decisions*, in Madison, Wisconsin. This workshop introduced over 100 participants to seven decision support tools. We asked the participants to evaluate the tools on a number of measures to help us understand how useful these tools would be to the participants' work as well as to the public at large.

After the conclusion of the workshop, we surveyed participants in order to determine the interest level for a second, similar workshop. We learned that 100% of respondents were interested in participating in a similar workshop with a new set of tools. Working with an expanded partner group, we planned *Changing Landscapes 2*.

## Workshop Structure

Over the course of the workshop, we introduced participants to a number of decision support tools, asked for feedback regarding the tools' utility and accessibility, and discussed a strategy for promoting their use by the public at large. Our hope was that *Changing Landscapes 1* and *2* would be a foundation for future regional workshops around the state where we will connect with interested citizens and local decision-makers thereby raising the quality of local discussion regarding land use and its impacts.

The workshop took place on January 22 and 23, 2004, at the Pyle Center, 702 Langdon Street, on the campus of UW-Madison. An agenda for each day follows.

Thursday, January 22 was an all-day meeting with around 100 participants attending. The day began with an introduction to the purpose of the workshop, its co-sponsors, and the two-day structure. Following that, a more detailed presentation described the range of existing decision support tools, as well as other tools and assistance available to local governments.

The following portion of the day was dedicated to demonstrations of three decision support tools. Presenters introduced their tool in three 75-minute sessions. The participants were divided to ensure relatively even group size throughout the day. The presenters were asked to hit a number of specified points regarding the specifications of the tool to provide a level of consistency in all the presentations. The evaluation form laid out these points measured on a scale of one to five. These forms were intended to elicit feedback about each tool with respect to an individual participant's background, affiliation, and segment of the population with which he/she works. By specifically addressing the points on the evaluation form, presenters conveyed the strengths and applications of their product while giving the participants a level of continuity by which they compared the different tools.

After the tool demonstrations, participants reconvened to hear a panel discuss their experiences using decision support tools in planning or decision-making processes here in Wisconsin. The panel session included time for audience participation that included questions collected throughout the day. Day one concluded with a social hour in the same location. This was a networking opportunity for participants to meet informally with other participants, sponsors and presenters.

On Friday, January 23 we reconvened for day two of the workshop where participants learned about more computer-based resources available for planning and decision-making. The day concluded with a group discussion about next-steps in this outreach and technical assistance program.